

VF- Tannenberg

OPERATIONS IN 1914

941

was one of elastic defense and delay in accordance with the modified Schlieffen Plan.

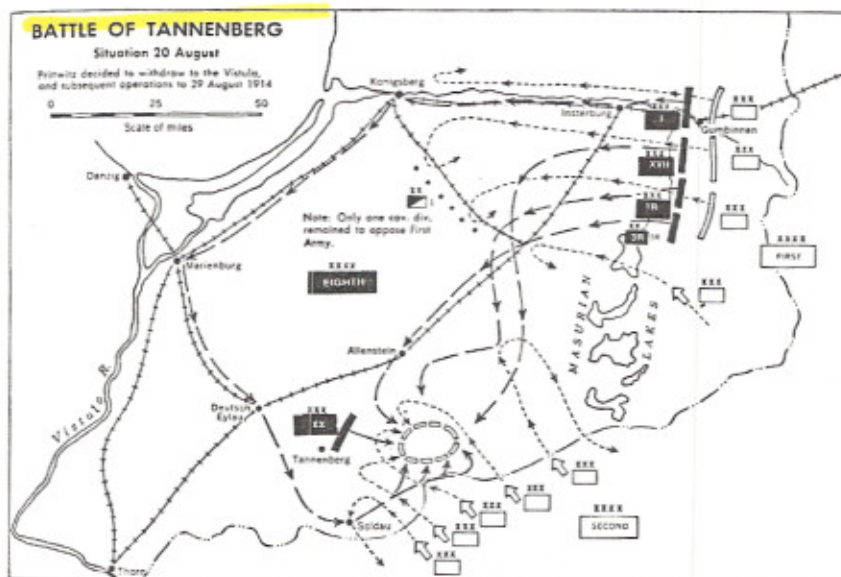
1914, August 17. **Battle of Stallupönen.** The center of Rennenkampf's widely strung advance met General **Hermann K. von François's** I German Corps, was badly mauled by the alert François, and was thrown back to the frontier with loss of 3,000 men. François then retired on Gumbinnen.

1914, August 20. **Battle of Gumbinnen.** Slowly the Russians advanced again. Prittwitz, aware also of the Russian Second Army's advance far to his southern flank,

feared envelopment. Aggressive François persuaded him to attack. François's own corps smashed in the Russian right flank, driving it back for 5 miles. Other German attacks were not successful, and a drawn battle resulted.

The Tannenberg Campaign

1914, August 20. **German Change in Command.** Prittwitz, in near panic after his unsuccessful attack against Rennenkampf, and with Samsonov's army posing a potential threat to his line of communications, telephoned Moltke, at Coblenz, to report his decision to withdraw to the Vistula



and to request reinforcements to be able to hold that river line. Moltke at once relieved Prittwitz of command, appointing in his place elderly General **Paul von Hindenburg**, called from retirement, with brilliant General **Erich Ludendorff**, hero of Liège (see p. 935), as his chief of staff. Thus was created a team destined for world renown.

1914, August 22. **Ludendorff's Plan.** After studying reports from the east, Ludendorff telegraphed orders to the individual corps commanders, directing a concentration against Samsonov's Second Army, while delaying Rennenkampf's First Army farther east. Joining Hindenburg later that day for the rail trip east, Ludendorff re-

ported his actions; Hindenburg approved. When they arrived at Marienburg, Eighth Army Headquarters, next day, they discovered that Lieutenant Colonel **Max Hoffmann**, Prittwitz' capable chief of operations, had already prepared for practically the same movements and dispositions that Ludendorff had ordered (August 20). (The coincidence is especially interesting as evidence of the uniform thought process of the German Army General Staff in dealing with an unexpected situation.) While one lone cavalry division was delaying fumbling Rennenkampf, the bulk of the German army was shifting south, by rail and road, against the equally incompetent Samsonov.

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1914, August 24. Battle of Orlau-Frankenau.

Advancing without reconnaissance or cavalry screen, Samsonov's central corps suddenly ran into entrenched units of the German XX Corps. Severe fighting raged all day, but the Russian center was unable to advance. Next day, while the Russian army rested, the XX Corps withdrew from Frankenau to Tannenberg, while other units of the Eighth Army hastened up to its right and left. The Germans, who had been listening to Samsonov's uncoded radio messages, now knew the locations of all Russian units, and were aware of their projected moves for the next day.

1914, August 26-31. Battle of Tannenberg.

Samsonov's right flank was pushed in from the north by the German XVII and I Reserve Corps; his left was enveloped and turned by François's hard-driving I Corps; his center was struck by the XX Corps. By nightfall of August 29, the encirclement was complete as François stretched his corps across the entire Russian rear. The rest was butchery of disorganized streams of rabble trying to escape the net. Not until the 27th had Jilinsky realized that his Second Army was in real danger; his orders to Rennenkampf to move to its assistance were obeyed only in shadow. Samsonov disappeared the night of the 29th; evidently he committed suicide. Russian losses totaled 125,000 men and 500 guns; the Germans lost between 10,000 and 15,000 men. Aside from its strategic significance, the German victory was a tremendous psychological coup; Allied confidence in Russia was shattered, while the German nation was roused to such a pitch of enthusiasm that the true significance of the Battle of the Marne, which ended 2 weeks later, was overlooked.

1914, September 9-14. First Battle of the Masurian Lakes. Turning northeast, the German Eighth Army promptly moved against the Russian First Army. Again the vigorous François and his I Corps provided the *coup de grâce*, driving in the Russian left. Rennenkampf finally disengaged under cover of a stout 2-division counterattack, spoiling the German effort to gain another double envelopment. The Russians retreated, having lost 125,000

men, 150 guns, and half their transport. German losses were about 40,000.

COMMENT. *Incompetent leadership, faulty reconnaissance, lack of secrecy, and poor communications, added to an astounding state of unpreparedness and shortage of matériel, all contributed to the Russian defeats. Russia never completely recovered from these disasters.*

AUSTRIAN INVASIONS OF SERBIA**1914, July 29. Bombardment of Belgrade.**

The first military action of the war, this Austrian bombardment of the Serbian capital had little effect other than to enrage the Serbs.

1914, August 12-21. Battle of the Jadar.

Austrian forces totaling more than 200,000 men, commanded by General Oskar Potiorek, crossed the Save and Drina rivers to invade Serbia from the west and northwest. They were opposed by slightly smaller numbers of tough, hardy Serb troops, inadequately equipped but battle-wise from their Balkan Wars experience (see p. 926), commanded by able Marshal Radomir Putnik. A Serb counterattack (August 16) punished the Austrians so severely that Potiorek withdrew across the Drina.

1914, September 7-8. Renewed Austrian Invasion.

Ignoring a bold, but limited, Serbian invasion of Austrian Bosnia (September 6), Potiorek made a night attack across the Drina. Putnik withdrew his troops from Bosnia and strongly counterattacked the Austrian bridgeheads.

1914, September 8-17. Battle of the Drina.

Unable to eliminate the Austrian bridgeheads in 10 days of vicious, bitter fighting, and running short of ammunition, Putnik withdrew to more defensible positions southwest of Belgrade.

1914, November 5-30. Austrian Offensive.

In the face of an offensive by the reinforced Austrian armies and short of ammunition, Putnik withdrew slowly and deliberately, planning to counterattack after the Austrians became overextended in the rough mountain country. He evacuated Belgrade, which the Austrians occupied (December 2). At the end of the month, ammunition, sent from France, arrived by rail from Salonika.

1914, December 3-9. Battle of Kolubra.

With the Kolubra River, behind the Aus-